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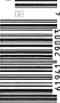
THE

BEAST IN THE CAVE

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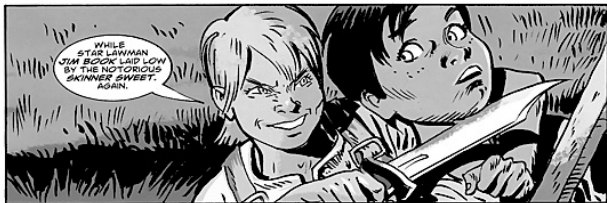
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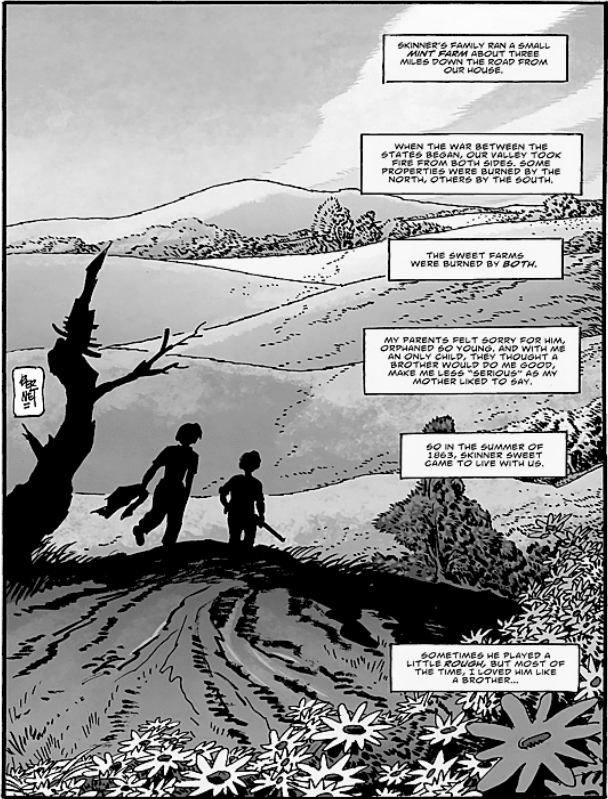


Jeff Smith

Garon County, Missouri, 1863







SKINNER'S FAMILY RAN A SMALL
HUNT FARM ABOUT THREE
MILES DOWN THE ROAD FROM
OUR HOUSE.

WHEN THE WAR BETWEEN THE
STATES BEGAN, OUR VALLEY TOOK
FIRE FROM BOTH SIDES. SOME
PROPERTIES WERE BURNED BY THE
NORTH, OTHERS BY THE SOUTH.

THE SWEET FARMS
WERE BURNED BY BOTH.

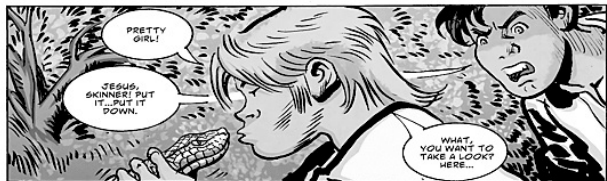
MY PARENTS FELT SORRY FOR HIM,
ORPHANED SO YOUNG, AND WITH ME
AN ONLY CHILD, THEY THOUGHT A
BROTHER WOULD DO ME GOOD,
MAKE ME LESS "SERIOUS" AS MY
MOTHER LIKED TO SAY.

SO IN THE SUMMER OF
1863, SKINNER SWEET
CAME TO LIVE WITH US.

SOMETIMES HE PLAYED A
LITTLE ROUGH, BUT MOST OF
THE TIME, I LOVED HIM LIKE
A BROTHER...







Southern New Mexico Territory. October, 1871

"...WITHOUT YOU TO CHASE
AFTER ME?"







Infantry Camp.

NO, WE'LL
CHARGE FIRST
THING IN THE
MORNING.



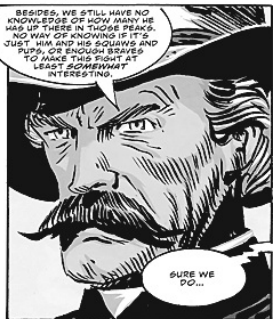
MUCH AS IT PAINS ME TO WAIT,
ASCENDING THE RIDGE IN THE
DARK WOULD BE FOOLISHNESS.
HOLE IN THE SKY KNOWS THE
TERRAIN; THIS IS HIS HOME. AND
I WILL NOT LOSE GOOD
MEN TO HIM OUT OF
IMPATIENCE.

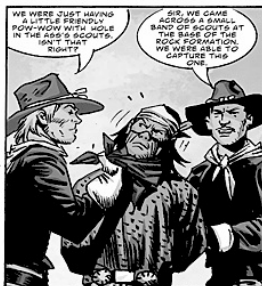
I'LL LET
THE MEN KNOW,
GENERAL
HAWLEY.



BESIDES, WE STILL HAVE NO
KNOWLEDGE OF HOW MANY HE
HAS UP THERE IN THOSE PEAKS.
NO WAY OF KNOWING IF IT'S
JUST HIM AND HIS SQUAWS AND
PUPS, OR ENOUGH BRAVES TO
MAKE THIS FIGHT AT
LEAST SOMEWHAT
INTERESTING.

SURE WE
DO...













SIR, IF I MAY, CORPORAL SWEET HAS A POINT ABOUT THE SIZE OF THE FORCE UP THERE. I AGREE WITH HIM ABOUT THE LIKELIHOOD OF OUR BEING OUTMATCHED.



THE FIRM ESTIMATE FROM FORT BOWIE IS THAT HOLE IN THE SKY HAS NO MORE THAN FIFTY MEN.

BUT SIR, WE JUST SAW...

FIFTY MEN, CORPORAL BOOK.



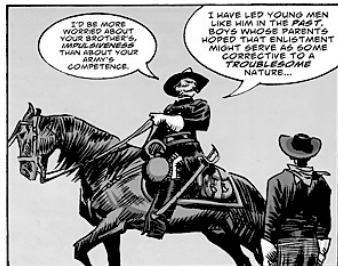
EVEN SO, HOLE IN THE SKY IS A SKILLED STRATEGIST. WE WERE AT BOWIE WHEN THE LAST OF THE 8TH CAME IN--



HA! THE 8TH? A BUNCH OF BUFFALO SOLDIERS? THIS HOLE IN THE SKY MAY HAVE GOTTEN LUCKY A FEW TIMES, BUT WE ARE NOT A GANG OF COLD-DEPS, CORPORAL BOOK.

WE MOUNT THE RIDGE AT DAWN.

AND CORPORAL BOOK, BETWEEN US...



I'D BE MORE WORRIED ABOUT YOUR BROTHER'S, MIND-BUSINESS THAN ABOUT YOUR ARMY'S COMPETENCE.

I HAVE LED YOUNG MEN LIKE HIM IN THE PAST. BOYS WHOSE PARENTS HOPED THAT ENLISTMENT MIGHT SERVE AS SOME CORRECTIVE TO A TROUBLESOME NATURE...



AND I WARN YOU, SUCH CASES NEVER END WELL.

FOR WHAT IT'S WORTH, SIR, THERE'S NO MAN I'D RATHER HAVE AT MY BACK THAN CORPORAL SWEET.



"ENOUGH, ALL RIGHT?
NOW, WHAT WE KNOW IS
HOLE IN THE SKY HAS
TO HAVE MORE THAN
FIFTY UP THERE. THAT'S
SIMPLE MATH."

"YOU THINK
IT'S SOME
KIND OF LAST
STAND?"

"JESUS."

"YEAH, OR
A FIRST
STAND."





"WHAT'S HE DOING UP THERE IN THOSE CLIFFS? WHY NOT DO IT ALREADY? COME DOWN AND CRUSH US..."

"HE PROBABLY KNOWS WE'RE WAITING ON THE MEXICANS. IF HE'S GOT THE NUMBERS, HE CAN GET MORE BANG FOR HIS BUCK THAT WAY."

"STILL, WHAT THE GODDAM IS HOLE IN THE SKY WAITING FOR THEN?"

"SO..."



"SO IT JUST DOESN'T SIT RIGHT IS ALL. ANY OF IT. AND THIS BUSINESS ABOUT 'MIMITEH'..."



"...SOME SPIRIT OF DEATH IN THE CLIFFS..."

"AW, COME ON NOW, JAMES..."



"...DON'T TELL ME YOU ACTUALLY BELIEVE IN MONSTERS."





I AM
LISSSSSTENING...

THE

BEAST IN THE CAVE

PART 1

SCOTT SNYDER-WRITER JORDI BERNET-ARTIST
DAVE MCCAIG-COLORS PAT BROSSAU-LETTERS COVER BY ALBUQUERQUE
JOE HUGHES-ASSISTANT EDITOR MARK DOYLE-EDITOR
AMERICAN VAMPIRE CREATED BY SCOTT SNYDER AND
RAFAEL ALBUQUERQUE

AMERICAN VAMPIRE

MARK DOYLE EDITOR

AMERICAN VAMPIRE #19

Hello, AMERICAN VAMPIRE readers,

Well, how about that? Another "Lost Tale of Skinner Sweet" starts off with a bang. Or should I say "fang"? Ha! I'm hilarious. I love it when Joe is on vacation. I get to make all the stupid puns I want. Seriously though, how about that, folks? Who knew that mortal enemies Jim Book and Skinner Sweet were friends. —hell, practically brothers?! And what about the "beast in the cave"? What's her story? And how will it affect things when we get back to the present? (the present, of course, being our past, but don't think about it too much. Makes your head hurt. Best to sit back and enjoy the ride). Speaking of enjoying the ride, we got lots of letters from folks enjoying AV, still waiting for letters about the amazing issue 18 and the finale to the Ghost War. Until then, let's take a look into the ol' mailbag and see what you had to say about previous issues:

Dear Editor:

AMERICAN VAMPIRE #16 final page: Heck yeah!

If you were to make that into a poster and put it on sale, I would so buy it.

The rest of the issue was great as well.

Paul Tapner
Dorset, Britain

Thanks, Paul. That's a good idea. I get a lot of reaction to that line. I think "Semper Fi, Motherfuckers" is probably people's favorite Skinner line, right after "Hello, Motherfucker, got any candy?" That one seems to get tweeted A LOT. Jeez, that Skinner sure has a potty mouth! That's all right. We love him anyway!

Dear Editor:

While AMERICAN VAMPIRE #17 was a great action-packed issue, I do have one question – how did Pearl know where they were?

When we last saw her, she was "ambushed" by a unit of Japanese soldiers. Did she interrogate any of them while she kicked their butts?

While I understand off-panel and/or implied plot points, I figured I would ask just to be sure.

Thanks,
Nick (dcfan4ever)

Good question, Nick. Although Pearl COULD have interrogated those soldiers, she didn't need to. She's like a shark. She can smell blood for miles and miles. Plus, she's connected to Henry AND Skinner on a very profound level; she knows their scents and can feel their presence. Think of it as vampire radar.

Dear AMERICAN VAMPIRE,

A little over a year ago, my wife bought me tickets to SDCC for Christmas. I was very excited to attend but had taken about a 20-year absence from all things comics. I had not picked up a title in a while. I decided that if I was going to attend a comic convention I had better find some comics to read.

I stepped into my local shop and asked for a recommendation. AMERICAN VAMPIRE had just come out, and they suggested I check it out. Needless to say, I have been a dedicated fan ever since. It blew my mind! In fact, I decided that if comics were this good I needed to be reading more of them.

My wife had no idea what she was unleashing in me, and I blame it all on the creative team behind AMERICAN VAMPIRE. I have since picked up many, many more titles and just wanted to thank you all for stoking my addiction. AMERICAN VAMPIRE remains the best title I look for every month. Keep it up! I need to feed my addiction, and thanks for getting me back into comics.

Worthy Glover, Jr.
Blanding, UT

Thanks for writing, Worthy. I think I should write a fan letter of my own to your wife for turning you on to AMERICAN VAMPIRE and back on to all things comics. So, here goes:

Dear Worthy's Wife (sorry, you never mentioned her name!)

Thank you for being a wicked awesome wife. Tickets to San Diego Comic-Con? Wow. That's a really cool gift. You should write a column on creative gift-giving. There are lots of folks out there who could learn from you. I once had a girl give me a bowling ball with HER name on it! Can you believe it? I don't even bowl! (Wait. Maybe that was an episode of The Simpsons... damn it. Where's Joe when I need him?)

Anyway, thanks for being so swell. Sorry your husband is addicted to comics again. But don't worry, we'll take care of him and keep him happy by giving him awesome stories every month.

Dear Editor,

AMERICAN VAMPIRE has brought me back to the comics genre. I admit I started reading it because of Stephen King's involvement, but I feel that Scott's knack for writing sharp storylines outshines even the King's in this aspect. I love my collection. I have every single one.

Thank you Vertigo, Scott, and Rafael.

Carrie Clevenger
Austin, TX

Thanks for writing, Carrie, and welcome back to the fold! Wow, AMERICAN VAMPIRE seems to be bringing all kinds of readers back to comics, and that's all right with me. You can put it on my tombstone: "Here Lies Mark Doyle. Made Folks Like Comics Again."

That's it for now. More "Beast in the Cave" next month. And wait until you see what Scott and Rafael are cooking up for the '50s...

Man, I'm exhausted. Too much work for one man. If anybody sees Joe out there, tell him I'm dying without him, I'm already thinking of stuff for my tombstone! JOOOOOOOOOOOO, COME BACK!

—Mark

To submit a letter to the editor go to:
www.dclatterspage.com
Letters may be sent by regular mail to this address:
Letters to the Editor
DC Comics
1700 Broadway
New York, NY 10019
ATTN: VERTIGO

Please include your full name, address, and telephone number for confirmation purposes. Letters should be no longer than 500 words and should not include attachments. Letters may be edited for length or clarity and may be published in any medium. Letters become the property of DC Comics. Unpublished letters will not be returned or acknowledged. Published letters may identify the writer by first name, hometown, state or country.



AMERICAN VAMPIRE #20

VERTIGO

SUBMIT YOUR LETTERS TO:
WWW.DCLETTERSPAGE.COM

THE HOTLIST



AMERICAN VAMPIRE #19

NEW STORYLINE! AMERICAN VAMPIRE flashes back to the early 1800s for a "Lost Tale of Skinner Sweet!" Featuring art by the legendary Jordi Bernet (Torpedo, JONAH HEX).



JOE THE BARBARIAN DELUXE EDITION HC

Collecting the acclaimed 8-issue miniseries from Grant Morrison and Sean Murphy!



HELLBLAZER #283

NEW STORYLINE! Gemma decides to get even with her uncle John Constantine by auctioning off his signature trenchcoat — which means complete hell for anyone who comes in contact with "The Devil's Trench Coat." By Milligan, Camuncoli and Landini.



SWEET TOOTH #25

Vertigo's weird and wonderful antlered epic reaches issue #25 as new revelations about Walter Fish and Project Evergreen push Jepperd over the edge!

AMERICAN VAMPIRE: SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST #4
CUBA: MY REVOLUTION SC
DIZ #69
FABLES #109
GREEK STREET VOL. 3: MEDEA'S LUCK
HOUSE OF MYSTERY #41
ZOMBIE #17
ZOMBIE VOL. 2: VAMPIRE
THE NEW YORK FIVE SC
NORTHLANDERS #44
SCALPED #52
THE UNWRITTEN #29

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THE HIT LIST

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ON THE

LEDGE

SPACEMAN



BRIAN AZZARELLO has been writing comics professionally since the mid-1990s. He is the author of **JOHNNY DOUBLE**, **BATMAN: BROKEN CITY** and the Harvey and Eisner Award-winning **100 BULLETS**, all created in collaboration with artist Eduardo Risso. His other work for DC includes the titles **JOKER**, **LOVELESS**, **SUPERMAN: FOR TOMORROW**, **SGT. ROCK: BETWEEN HELL AND A HARD PLACE**, **FILTHY RICH**, **FIRST WAVE** and most recently the all-new **WONDER WOMAN** ongoing series. Azzarello lives in Chicago with his wife, artist Jill Thompson, and twitters only when he has something to say.

Dear Future,

Fuck you.

You promised me a jetpack, and didn't deliver. You've led me on and really let me down, so you can go to hell.

I'll admit it: when you handed me a glass of Tang and a Space Food Stick I fell for you hard. You told me you were gonna be beyond my wildest dreams and we would be going places (using that jetpack, right?). You literally promised me the moon and I bought in hook, line and sinker. Well, if I still had that Space Food Stick I'd shove it up your fat bony ass, you two-faced, fun-squashing bag of woe. You can go to hell.

Now, while you may think I'm being harsh, you should know: I don't care what you think, because I don't trust you. Time and time again you've come to nothing. Like, what happened to Super Sonic Transport? Everything in the sky was supposed to be an SST by now. Well, the Concorde has been grounded for the better part of a decade, and while it was in the air it cost so much to ride, it was nothing but a roller coaster for rich people. Thanks a lot for the glad hand, future. You can go to hell.

And while I confess you haven't been a total failure, I'm still left with the feeling it's all been a con game, a bait and switch. Sure, it's fantastic having the greatest public library and XXX bookstore at my fingertips 24/7, but the truth? Really? It's all just a big distraction—designed to lose me in things I don't care about but become obsessed with—and then it becomes about money, and that's what it's always about. Smart phone this, tablet that, aye aye aye... Delivering information is not action and adventure, and that's what you promised. Where's my jetpack? You stink.

So go to hell, future. Get a move on; time's a-wasting. And if you have any trouble finding your way...

I'll take you there myself.

Sincerely,

Brian Azzarello

P.S. Fucking cure cancer and all is forgiven.

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